



WSD **Personnel**
Washington State
**Employee
Assistance
Program**

FrontLineSupervisor

Olympia 360.753.3260

A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

Seattle 206.281.6315

Spokane 509.482.3686

Toll Free 877.313.4455

March 2009

<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ **How can I support employees who remain after a layoff? Many relationships were lost, and grief and anger exist. Will this situation eventually right itself? Perhaps I should make myself scarce because I represent management, the target of their anger.**

Do not make yourself scarce. You have the ability to influence employees and improve morale by what you say, do, and don't do. If employees are angry and upset, you will ratchet up their feelings of resentment by avoiding them. Likewise, coping with your stress by hiding out will also backfire. Healing takes time, but remember that you and your employees want the same thing—a happier workplace. With that in mind, get closer to your employees by accepting in the short run their view of themselves as survivors. Employees are waiting and watching to see if you demonstrate compassion and understanding, which is crucial to their recovery. Employees can then move to the next stage of adaptation and acceptance of change. Never declare that employees should “get over it.” Discuss with the EAP how to encourage activities that rebuild the feeling of commitment workers have toward the workplace. Also, check out Lay-off Workshops being offered by the WA State Department of Personnel throughout the state. These workshops offer employees who have been impacted by layoff with helpful information and resources to navigate through the difficult process.

■ **I feel insecure about my position. I don't seem to be able to get my point across to upper management, gain their acceptance for my ideas, or satisfy them. Can the EAP help me?**

Many supervisors struggle with uncertainty about their abilities and relationships with management. EAPs can help because they observe best practices in communication and are sensitive to the nuances of work culture. They provide tips, techniques, guidance, and “know-how” to help supervisors improve effectiveness. You may discuss many topics like how to analyze issues from upper management's perspective or how to use empathy to deepen your understanding of the boss's outlook. You may discover which part of your operation management values, pressures they face, and how they define success. You may learn to avoid mistakes such as bringing only ideas and excitement to a meeting, to avoid making assertions without proof, and also to not take the rejection of your ideas personally but rather as a challenge to discover missing pieces that will help you win acceptance.

■ **My employee does not follow through on assignments I delegate. When I ask why, the employee says it is “busywork.” I’m open-minded. Perhaps I have delegation all wrong. How do I know for sure whether or not I am delegating?**

It can be hard to determine whether you are delegating work or simply piling on tasks that you need done. Many supervisors do not know the difference. Employees often do, as signified by their reaction to what and how things land in their laps. Ask yourself if the assignment you are delegating frees you up to do what matters most. Do you spend time training and motivating employees regarding the assignments given to them? If you’re just anticipating a due date, that’s not delegation. Delegation will test your communication skills. Encouragement; delivery of praise for a job well done; and provision of tools, resources, and authority are often necessary in the delegation process. What about goals, timetables, and expectations? Have you explained the importance of the assignment and how you will measure success? With delegation, *both* you and your employee grow from the experience.

■ **My employee became upset when I said documentation regarding job performance concerns and expectations would be faxed confidentially to the EAP. Is this just manipulation?**

Consider your Agency policy and the steps your Agency wants you to follow when making a supervisor referral to the EAP. Obviously your employee was surprised that documentation concerning job performance would be provided to the EAP. Sending documentation to support the rationale for an EAP referral, however, is consistent and customary with the EAP process. Remember, an EAP without information from the supervisor relies solely upon what the employee-client reports. Let the EAP know about this reaction because it will help the EAP set the employee at ease during the first appointment.

■ **Can you describe in simple terms how to meet and confront an employee with performance problems so the interview is effective?**

Meet with your employee in private about the issue or concern. Describe what happened from your perspective. Never become agitated or aggressive with your employee. Ask the employee for his or her account or explanation of the behavior, action, or performance shortcoming. Inform the employee about the negative effects of the performance issue on productivity and on the workplace. Ask the employee if there is anything else that explains the continuation of performance problems. Provide feedback or make a statement regarding what is commendable about the employee’s performance. Inform the employee that his or her current performance is not acceptable. Describe what you want done differently, what must change, and when those changes must occur. Let the employee know the ultimate outcome if performance does not change or improve. Remind the employee about the EAP or incorporate a supervisor referral as appropriate.

NOTE from the EAP to Supervisors and Managers:

Washington State is facing tough economic times, including employee layoffs. This can be a very stressful process, and supervisors are often asked difficult questions by their employees. The WA State Department of Personnel has gathered together helpful resources and information about layoffs in one convenient location. These are available at: <http://www.dop.wa.gov/Managers/Layoff/default.htm>.

NOTES